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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, SE WILLIAMSON, DRL,
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: "PRESIDENT AL-BASHIR IS A TABULA RASA" SAYS
ADVISOR

REF: KHARTOUM 300

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Presidential Advisor Dr. Mansur Khalid warns that the National Congress Party is now divided in contending fiefdoms jockeying for power and canceling each other out, under the distracted supervision of A disengaged President Al-Bashir. Meanwhile, the SPLM uneasily monitors a disloyal and scheming Riek Machar, tries to put its own house in order and asks where is all the promised American help to enable the unprepared party to challenge the Islamists on a national level. End summary

A NATIONAL SECURITY OLIGARCHY

12. (C) Charge Fernandez called on Sudanese Presidential Advisor and SPLM insider Dr. Mansur Khalid on March 6. Khalid, former Sudanese foreign minister and one of the few prominent Northern Arabs to have thrown in his lot with the SPLM many years ago, is a key advisor to SPLM leader and Sudanese First Vice President Salva Kiir, especially on Arab affairs. Khalid recently became a Presidential Advisor as a result of the negotiation that lead to the SPLM returning to the Government of National Unity (GNU) in late December 2007. Kiir's insistence that former foreign minister Lam Akol be fired and replaced by the wily Dr. Khalid was one element of a complex government crisis that almost brought North and South Sudan back to war. Al-Bashir refused to accept Khalid in the MFA but reluctantly agreed to him as one of a dozen current presidential advisors - he actually advises Kiir not the President.

13. (C) Khalid noted the problem of dealing with and negotiating with the co-ruling National Congress Party (NCP). "It is not the NCP of old," he remarked. The party had once been a well oiled and disciplined Islamist machine. That had broken down and it was now a collection of rival, often bickering fiefdoms, "a national security oligarchy." The problem begins with President Omar al-Bashir, who "is a tabula rasa, a blackboard on which everyone writes, where this is then erased and then someone else writes something different." Mansur does not see the Sudanese President as a particularly malevolent figure "mostly just disengaged." He has real power but often prefers the path of least resistance that opens before him as a result of his subordinates' rivalry. Around him, his captains jockey for position. He identified four cliques all with their interests, "at least four." Vice-President Ali Osman Taha, the architect of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), is both a sincere

Islamist and a person who would like to "do the right thing for Sudan." This leads him to sometimes take radical positions at odds with his political motives.

NAFIE, THE RUTHLESS PRAGMATIST

14. (C) Taha's great rival, Senior Assistant to the President Dr. Nafie Ali Nafie, cares about one thing "power" and is not motivated by strong political or ideological motives. "He is both ruthless and practical and would be willing to deal with the Americans or make peace in Darfur" if it eases his path to power. Other semi-independent fiefdoms are the Military and the Intelligence Service, who are, as often happens in Arab and third world regimes, rivals to a certain extent. NISS DG recently briefed FVP Kiir about Sudan's plans to subvert Chad with Kiir responding "I wish you all had told me you intended to take this path before you committed me to it." Khalid described Kiir's frustration in dealing with the NCP, "they are hopeless" even though there are actual decent people within the NCP "who would like to settle all their problems," decisions are often blocked by criminals who have a vested interest in confrontation "they know if things are settled, they will be called into account for their many crimes so they prefer the perpetual crises we usually face in Sudan."

15. (C) Khalid blamed the U.S. for part of the problem, "you bark but don't bite." American sanctions irritate and annoy the regime but don't hurt the oligarchy, "they hurt ordinary Sudanese, or the private sector," but this is not the concern of senior officials who keep their loot in Chinese or Malaysian or some Islamic banks in the Arabian Gulf. He characterized the Sudanese regime as relatively weak but all

the American pressure and rhetoric doesn't really affect other players - European countries, Russia and China, India and Arab countries - who prop up the regime. He said that the SPLM and its leaders still has problems accessing some bank accounts because of American sanctions.

16. (C) The former Foreign Minister described the recent successful overture by the NCP to the Umma Party of former Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi (septel) as "the counsel of desperation." Al-Bashir told Al-Mahdi that if "we Northern Arabs don't stick together" they could lose power never to regain it. The Umma Party is mostly a spent force but Al-Mahdi is susceptible to this rhetoric of "who lost Sudan for the Arabs?" The NCP's greatest fear is that the SPLM will exploit the tremendous political vacuum that exists in Northern Sudan, "the potential is there but we are not yet ready."

A TREACHEROUS RIEK MACHAR

17. (C) Khalid said that the SPLM faces two major issues: the first is corrupt GOSS VP Riek Machar who is conspiring, and using government funds to create his own parallel machine "he is not trustworthy." Salva Kiir knows this but wants to avoid an outright confrontation (which he abhors anyway) and find some "wise way of dealing with Riek without blowing up the South." The second problem is just the mechanics of political preparation, "we talk about 6 million enrolled in the party" but they are finding disorganization and "empty party houses" in the states and districts.

18. (C) The SPLM is sending Deputy SG Anne Itto around to inspect the party infrastructure in the regions to see exactly what is the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the party strength. He complained that the Americans have promised much, "for example, during Kiir's visit to the U.S. in November," but delivered very little to make the SPLM as effective as it could be on a national level. "This should have started years ago but it seems that everything starts late in Sudan."

19. (C) Comment: A veteran conspirator for decades, the spry Dr. Khalid sees a shifting and dynamic Sudanese political scene which can go either way, towards more war or towards a definitive change for the better. He believes that the United States, obsessed with Darfur, has mostly ignored the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) since its signing in 2005 and especially the key provisions for elections and political transformation. The discourse on Darfur has meant that strengthening the SPLM to enable it to effectively challenge the NCP on its home turf, the Arabic-speaking North, has been given short shrift whenever such a strategy actually receives any attention at all. Despite the good efforts of some institutions like IRI and NDI, the invaluable work of USAID, we agree with his analysis and see as one of the Mission's greatest challenges to focus on Darfur and on the North-South aspects of the CPA without losing track of what is largely an internal partisan political struggle that will determine this huge country's political future, a struggle where material American support can tip the scales towards a more humane and pluralistic Sudan if we are willing to engage on a much more substantive scale. End comment.

FERNANDEZ